

# BREAKING GROUND



MEET COUNCILMAN  
**DARREN JERNIGAN**



[ 5 ] A JOURNEY OF PURPOSE



[ 6 ] BROTHERS AND SISTERS



[ 12 ] CHATTANOOGA SPEEDERS

T E N N E S S E E  
C O U N C I L



CONTENTS

- 3 Meet Councilman Darren Jernigan
- 4 Bart Dodson: A Profile
- 5 A Journey of Purpose: A Council Member Testifies on Behalf of Her Child with Autism
- 6 Brothers and Sisters
- 8 Siblings: Life’s Longest Friendship
- 9 Film Review: “Darius Goes West”
- 9 Tennessee Disability MegaConference
- 10 Sports and Physical Activity Resources
- 11 Groundbreaking Wellness Program
- 12 Meet the Chattanooga Speeders
- 13 Becoming an Active Part of the Community
- 14 Are You Prepared?
- 16 News from Pathfinder
- 16 Tennessee Dulcimer Choir
- 17 Youth Summer Sign Program
- 18 Tennessee Spotlight
- 19 Invitation for Submissions to the Annual Arts Issue

Cover photo by Robert Glover Photography

Editorial Addendum:

In our last issue (#41), in the article, "A New Level of Independence and Privacy", we left out an important piece of information about Paul Ford's educational years. Although St. Andrews Presbyterian College was a very positive experience for Mr. Ford, his first true "inclusive" experiences took place at Christ the King elementary school and Father Ryan High School in Nashville.

CONTACT INFORMATION



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MEET COUNCILMAN  
DARREN JERNIGAN

Recently, *Breaking Ground* had a conversation with Darren Jernigan to discuss his newest role in life — Councilman for District 11 in Davidson County. Mr. Jernigan grew up in District 11, attending Dodson Elementary in Hermitage before transferring to DuPont Elementary in Old Hickory in 1981. Mr. Jernigan continued through the public school system at DuPont Hadley, DuPont High School and graduated from Hunters Lane Comprehensive High School in 1988, shortly after DuPont High School closed. His higher education continued at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, where he received degrees in Political Science and Public Relations.

**BG:** You’ve spent time in Washington, DC, and been immersed in the study of criminal justice. But how long have you had aspirations to run for a political post and was there an event that made you finally decide that the time was right?

**DJ:** I have always been a public policy junkie. I have degrees in political science and public relations from Austin Peay State University, so I would say my aspirations started in college. I ran and won as a Senator in the student body council at Austin Peay. I caught the fever in Washington and from there I never turned back.

**BG:** You have long ties to your community. In what ways did that help you in the development and execution of your successful campaign?

**DJ:**Tip O’Neill said all politics is local. It is a must to be involved in your community and have a genuine desire to see the environment around you become better, safer and stronger. I am a member of at least a dozen organizations and have held leadership roles in those organizations to gain experience. If you do a good job, folks trust that you will do the same as a public servant.

**BG:** What was involved in your campaign? Specifically, how long was the actual process, from deciding to run to the election, and were there specific challenges along the way or minor successes that drove you on?

**DJ:** I decided to run in August of ‘06, and began immediately raising money for an election that would be held in August ‘07. An election is much like a roller coaster, with good days and not so good days. Accessibility is always a challenge and going door-to-door is not the easiest of tasks, but it’s rewarded when folks see the effort you’re making to ask for their vote.

**BG:** How much of your campaign was directly done by you and how much did you, or were you able to, rely on volunteers for support in getting your “word” out?



Photo by Michelle Morse

**DJ:** I was involved in nearly every aspect of the campaign. I set the tone of the campaign on how I wished it to be run. I then hired a campaign manager with the money I raised and from there he was instrumental in recruiting and managing volunteers. Other than a person’s love, their time and labor is a precious gift and I was most grateful for all my volunteers.

**BG:** I hope you don’t mind us asking this, but in what ways did your disability have an impact on your campaign?

**DJ:** I’ve been active in leadership roles within my community for years, so most folks knew that I could do the job regardless of my disability. It was one of those things that was, “well done is better than well said.” There were questions at times if I could physically do the job, but I’m here to tell you that campaigning for the office was and is much more demanding than actually holding it.

I was the first person in Metro history to be elected with a physical disability. No pressure, right? I hope it does create awareness on some, especially for that young man or woman with a disability to know that they too could run and win a public office. It is America after all.

**BG:** Did the platform for your campaign address any specific disability issues?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 →



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**DJ:** No, my platform issues ranged from public safety, education, illegal immigration, transportation to Metro services. I focused on issues that impacted everyone regardless of having a disability or not.

**BG:** As Councilman now, are there disability issues that you’re working on?

**DJ:** Councilmember-at-Large Megan Barry and I are planning on introducing a bill that would require closed captioning for the deaf and hard of hearing on Channel 3, which broadcasts the Metro government, including the Council meetings. It is imperative that Metro government effectively communicate with all of its citizens.

**BG:** What are the community issues that are most important to you and what should your constituents be most aware of or concerned about?

**DJ:** Each community and neighborhood in my District has unique problems and issues they face. Public safety is always a top priority, but

I’ve been really focusing on constituent services. While it may seem a small matter on why they are calling me, I do realize it is important to them. I do my best to keep my entire district informed either through email or town hall meetings.

**BG:** Are you enjoying this work?

**DJ:** Absolutely! As I mentioned before, I love creating and influencing public policy. It’s not work, if you love what you’re doing. I receive a tremendous amount of satisfaction by simply helping people. Politics is a funny thing. If you’re in it for the wrong reasons, the people will see right through you and you won’t last long at all. Public service is in my blood and I find it very rewarding.

**BG:** Anything else you’d like to share with us?

**DJ:** I would encourage everyone to get into politics at some point — no matter what level. Don’t let anyone ever tell you that it’s not possible.

## BART DODSON: A Profile

BY FLOYD STEWART

Have you ever heard the name Bart Dodson, 1993 Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame member? If your answer is no, the reason is because he is an individual with a disability. With so many accomplishments in sports, the community and life, you would think his name would be a household word.

On January 15, 1984, I was involved in an automobile accident that left me with a cervical spinal injury (SCI). In short, the wreck broke my neck, leaving me paralyzed from the shoulders down. I spent one year in rehabilitation and was thrust back into the world of able-bodied folk with my heart and soul ready to bounce back. However, I didn’t have a clue as to how. My criteria for negotiating activities of daily living had changed completely, but they took a dramatic, positive turn after I entered Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU).

I knew I had to change my vocation. For 13 years, I had been an industrial electrician. The damage to my spinal cord ended my career in construction. I set out on a journey to secure a new career by getting a college education. Once on campus, I found myself totally and utterly lost.

After a couple of weeks, I began to notice other chair users. I mingled and met other individuals with similar disabling conditions. I was introduced to a young gentleman named Bart Dodson. Bart has what the medical profession calls an incomplete SCI. Tall in stature with a slight build, Bart had arm, wrist and some upper body movement, which gave him the ability to push an ultra-light sports chair. The chair housed a frame of six feet or so, sporting somewhat of a pageboy haircut with some of the blondest blonde hair I had ever seen. Casually dressed in jeans and tennis shoes, I thought to myself, this guy must live in the sun. I found out later that he was an avid athlete in training for the upcoming Olympic trials.

The first thing I noticed about Bart was his facial expression. He had the look of a warrior, with confidence and sheer determination in his eyes. A look I had not seen on an individual with severe limitations to his activities of daily living. Activities that I, as a so-called “able body”, had previously taken for granted.

A survivor of a driving accident when he was still a teenager, Bart gave me one of my first notions of how to be an “overcomer”. His eyes and his demeanor spoke loudly, saying press on; you can’t change the past, but you can shape your future.

Bart and I talked about routine daily living and the future and issues of self care for individuals with SCI. I noticed that he was focused on doing, not struggling. He spoke of the Paralympics for individuals with disabilities. I had never heard of this event, but knew it was a major happening in his life because when he spoke about it he seemed to grow even more intense, more focused. His view of school changed my thinking. He saw it as a stepping stone, not a job. As I slowly got to know Bart, I noticed other peoples’ reactions to him. He seemed to command a level of respect that could only come through having and exhibiting a high level of integrity.

As time passed, I saw Bart marry another MTSU grad and become a father. Statistically, 70% of individuals who survive a catastrophic injury or illness separate or never marry. He competed in the 1992 Paralympics in Barcelona, Spain, and is the proud owner of eight gold medals. Bart now owns and manages Music City Medical Supply Company, located in Murfreesboro.

When *Breaking Ground* asked me to write a little something about Bart, I was more than happy to, for he is a true overcomer. Someone once said that the definition of an overcomer is an ex-loser who simply changes his way of living. My friend Bart never saw himself as a loser, but as an individual who could, and still does, make a difference.

*Floyd Stewart is an independent living specialist with the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee.*

## A JOURNEY OF PURPOSE: A Council Member Testifies on Behalf of Her Child with Autism

BY ANGELA HAZLEHURST

There must be times in every person’s life – whether it is a person with a disability or a parent of a child with a disability – when you ask the question, why? In my six-year journey of facing autism, I have often asked that mysterious question. In my four years of serving on the Council on Developmental Disabilities, I have graciously witnessed individuals answering their “why?” by finding a unique and profound purpose in life.

William Yates Hazlehurst entered our world on February 11, 2000. He was the light of our life. My husband, Rolf, and I were in absolute awe. Throughout his first year of life, Yates hit every developmental milestone and displayed a smile that could light up any room. By one year, he was engaging family members in conversations with words like peas (please), tank you (thank you), juice, bubba, etc. He often drove his blue police car throughout the house as he babbled on his pretend cell phone, an obvious imitation of his mommy. Life was quite a joy at the Hazlehurst’s, and Rolf never seemed to miss an opportunity to video our little pride and joy.

However, things began to change for little Yates shortly after his 12-month vaccinations. I can remember saying, “Yates...Yates...” and he would not look at me. Not only was Yates disinterested, he was continuously ill and developed chronic diarrhea. The little boy who once lit up a room had lost all speech and would scream and cry for hours.

Rolf and I searched for answers and any kind of hope for our first born. In June of 2002, seven months pregnant with our second child, I first learned the word autism. We were devastated.

The years that followed were consumed with ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, medical interventions and biomedical treatments. This began our journey of bringing our son back to us. And, over the years, we have made progress. Two steps forward, one step back.

Today, Yates is a handsome, loveable little guy who recently learned how to give an Eskimo kiss. Although his language is limited and he still exhibits characteristics of autism, he no longer screams for hours and his precious eye contact has largely returned. As a mother, you begin to praise the good days and ignore the bad. You begin to focus on what your child can do and less on what he cannot do. In my personal journey, I began to see that attitude is everything.



Photo By Perkins Photography

From left: son, Yates; father, Rolf; mother, Angela; daughter, Sarah

Five years after Yates was diagnosed with autism, my cell phone rang. I distinctly remember that it was a warm Summer day. I immediately recognized my husband’s voice as he blurted, “Angela, we’ve been chosen out of 5,000 claims across the United Sates to testify as the second test case in the Omnibus Autism Proceeding [OAP].” My stomach sank. I knew this sounded really important, but I didn’t fully grasp what he was talking about. I was soon educated.

The OAP is an efficient method of proceeding on the nearly 5,000 individual vaccine claims filed by families on behalf of their children who have autism or a similar condition. For the first time in history, a court would decide if vaccines cause autism and, if so, under what conditions.

Naturally, this was big news and, quite frankly, I felt a little overwhelmed. However, I knew that our testimony could and would begin to halt what is now viewed by the National Institutes of Health as an epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), autism now affects 1 in 150 children and continues to escalate. As I was juggling these thoughts in my head, a sudden and surreal peace came over me. I knew I was beginning a journey of purpose and an answer to my question of “why?”.

On October 15, 2007, Rolf and I, my mother-in-law, my sister-in law and Dr. Jean Ronnel Corbier, Yates’ pediatric neurologist, entered the United States Court of Federal Claims. Our case was heard by the Honorable Patricia Campbell-Smith, Special Master. During our testimony, our family described Yates’ first year of life and his downward spiral. However, it was the testimony of Dr. Corbier that provided the critical medical testimony which was necessary to prevail. As he spoke, I was honored and proud that he has been Yates’ treating physician for more than five years. He continues to treat Yates to this day.

We have been told that we will have a verdict in the Summer of 2008. In the meantime, we continue our journey of bringing Yates back to us.

*Angela Hazlehurst represents the Southwest Tennessee Development District on the Council on Developmental Disabilities, is chair on the Council’s Projects Review Committee and serves on the Executive Committee of the Council.*



Scotty Twyman & Lori Pope

Photo by Kent Creative

# BROTHERS AND SISTERS

BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

“I never thought much about it ... my brother was treated as much like the rest of us as was possible ... he played with us, went places with us on our bikes, he followed us around like little brothers do; he went to special ed. classes in school, he did chores around the house that he could, we had fights just like all the rest; he was happy, he’d get mad; he was just another brother but a little special.”

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a challenging time. Little is known generally about siblings who have a brother or sister with a disability and even less is known about this important transition time, when life decisions are being made.

“There have been studies of siblings who were asked to look back upon their transition years, but we were interested in siblings who were going through it now,” said Ann Morse, director of the Tennessee Sibling Study. “We wanted to hear from typically developing siblings deciding where to go after high school, who to marry, and/or if they would settle close to home. We wanted to know if they were thinking about how their relationships with their brothers and sisters might change as the years passed. So we set out to interview 18- to 30-year-old siblings.”

The Tennessee Adult Sibling Survey, conducted over the course of six months by Ms. Morse and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center investigator and Susan Gray Chair in Education and Human Development, Ann Kaiser, PhD, was funded by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. The survey closed in February 2008, and data are still being analyzed. Although 18- to 71-year-old siblings completed the survey, only siblings between the ages of 18 and 30 were interviewed. Most were not yet a primary caregiver for their sibling with a disability and most of the siblings with disabilities were still living in the family home.

“I love my sister dearly. She has helped me grow and learn so much about the world and the people in it. I have an open mind and a desire to help those in need because of my relationship with her. I am very fond of her and have always been very protective of her, even through sibling rivalry.”

How much the siblings are thinking about their future relationship with their sibling with a disability depends on a number of factors. “First of all, if you’re in that age group, your sibling still could be quite young,” said Dr. Kaiser. “There is a real difference in how siblings without a disability are thinking about the future when their sibling with a

disability is still in school versus a situation where the sibling has left high school. The concerns and knowledge of siblings are driven a lot by the age and the placement of their brother or sister with the disability. Some of the 29-year-olds are ‘old’ and some of them are ‘young’. Some are in graduate school and don’t have families, and some have been divorced and have three kids. What they are thinking about the future depends on where they are in their own lives, and whether their sibling is still in school.”

## FUTURE CAREGIVERS

There are noticeable trends about whether a sibling will assume the role of future primary caregiver. One factor is whether the sibling without a disability is the only other sibling. Another is the gender of the sibling. Female siblings tend to become caregivers more often than male siblings. In addition, a sibling’s proximity to the family home can determine whether an active caregiver role will be adopted. Many of the siblings without disabilities who were interviewed were living close to, if not still in, the family home. Of siblings in college, many came home every weekend or even every day. If siblings chose to attend college far from home, most moved back or planned to move back after graduation.

“My sister is my favorite person in the world. I call her when I need a lift in my day, and she calls me when something sad or scary happens (like a thunderstorm) or something exciting (like a fire drill at school). Basically, it’s just like any sister relationship.”



Katie and Matthew Moore

Photo by Kent Creative

Ms. Morse and Dr. Kaiser are curious about how much these trends have to do with having a sibling with a disability and how much it has to do with the importance placed on family in the South. “We wonder whether our sample is different than a national sample,” said Dr. Kaiser. “Because family seems to be enormously important to people living in Tennessee and they speak readily about the closeness in their families, does this trend reflect the culture? We don’t know yet. It will be interesting to compare.”

## ADVICE FROM SIBLINGS

“I am struck by how mature the siblings were,” said Ms. Morse. “Their responses were extremely thoughtful. They had a lot to say about what worked and what didn’t work growing up. We asked them what would have made it easier to support their siblings when they were growing up and what would make it easier to support their siblings in the future.”

Several siblings reported that open and frequent communication about the sibling’s disability is important. Although some parents reported that they purposely withheld things from their children to spare them the burden, siblings want to be kept informed. They want to have functional information about how to access or qualify for and how to manage services and supports. Yet, perhaps the most frequent responses from siblings about what helped or what would have helped was about family or individual counseling and the need for peer support.

“The folks who were most positive about their past experiences were folks who said, ‘My parent(s) celebrated the achievements of all the kids in the family,’” said Ms. Morse. “‘There was a child with disabilities, and we knew we needed to pay special attention to him or her, but my parents also gave a lot of attention to us. We had activities we did together and activities we did separately.’ While siblings may have wanted more attention than they received, they understood why it was so.”

On the whole, Dr. Kaiser and Ms. Morse report that siblings tend to be doing very well. Preliminary findings show that they feel they have more compassion, empathy and respect for others. They feel they may be more aware of injustices, may be more responsible and may be more open to learning new things because they have a brother or a sister with a disability.

“My relationship with my sister is great. She and I can do things socially together and spend time just getting to know each other better. We truly respect each other. We talk on the phone most every day. I try to go visit her at least once a month, and she comes to stay with me sometimes.”

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.



# SIBLINGS: *Life's Longest Friendship*

BY ASHLEY COULTER

"Where there's a will, there's a way."  
This is a saying I grew up hearing,  
because it's a saying my family always associated with my brother, Will.

When I was four years old, there was a new addition to our family – my little brother! At that young age, I didn't realize that he was born 11 weeks too early. I recall having to shake him whenever his monitor started beeping to ensure that he was breathing. I remember having to go to all of the therapies during the summertime, in the hopes that it would allow Will some independence. Though I have these memories that most siblings do not, I also have the memories of telling each other secrets, of watching movies together, of going to our favorite restaurants and of making up games to play – the "typical games" of siblings during childhood.

My brother has been a straight-A student. He enjoys music, computers, baseball, bowling and, oh yeah, he has cerebral palsy. He also has more determination than anyone I know and an outlook on life that I truly believe we should all adopt. At age two, Will already had some goals. He wanted to walk, which became a focus in his physical therapy sessions. More recently, he decided he wanted to walk at his high school graduation. As his sister and as his friend, I could not have been prouder than the moment I saw an entire arena full of people on their feet and clapping for my brother as he walked across the stage to receive his high school diploma, which included recognition as a member of the National Honor Society. I show the video of this accomplishment as much as I possibly can because I think Will is such an inspirational individual.

I know that there are many other adult brothers and sisters of individuals with disabilities who have had similar experiences and who are so proud of what their siblings have accomplished. Thanks to Don Meyer, director of the Sibling Support Project and creator of SibShops, light is being shed on these important relationships.

Research tells us that there are many "common traits" of siblings of people with disabilities, or "sibs". These traits, both good and bad, include patience, maturity, appreciation, empathy, favoring vocations involving helping professions, jealousy, embarrassment, anger, grief, anxiety and isolation. Mr. Meyer states, "The sibling relationship is deeply significant and is the longest-lasting bond we will likely ever have," yet most siblings do not have a support system in place to deal with the challenges they face.

As a sibling myself, I believe that there need to be groups where sibs can come together and talk about all of the emotions, both good and bad, associated with having a sibling with a disability, which is exactly what SibShops are! I was trained to be a facilitator and now am the Lead Facilitator for the SibSaturday program at the Vanderbilt Kennedy



Ashley Coulter hugging her brother, Will Ferrell

Photo by Candie Ferrell

Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VKCEDD). [See BG, *Issue 40 2/08, page 10*] As I discovered more about the research surrounding sibling issues, I learned that there was a group, the Sibling Leadership Network, that was organizing a conference to discuss sibling issues and develop white papers concerning all of these issues.

On November 9 and 10, 2007, over 80 brothers and sisters, advocates, funders and other professionals convened in Washington, DC, to discuss services and supports, research and public policy. From these discussions and follow-up meetings, three white papers will be developed. "Their ultimate goal is to create opportunities for siblings to partner with government and service providers to ensure the highest quality of life, now and in the future, for their entire families," said Tamar Heller, of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

After attending this meeting, several parties were interested in starting a Tennessee adult sibling group. A small group of individuals at VKCEDD has met once a month to discuss "next steps". Working with collaborators from across Tennessee, we hope to have a statewide conference in 2009.

I'm trying to do all I can at this point in my life to be as prepared as possible down the line for any responsibility I may take on in coordinating care for Will. My dream for Will is for him to have a job he enjoys — he is currently taking online courses resulting in a Microsoft Engineer Certification — live independently and to just live life to the fullest.

For more information about efforts regarding a Tennessee adult sibling group, contact Ashley Coulter at ashley.coulter@vanderbilt.edu.

# "DARIUS GOES WEST"—The Roll of His Life

BY ASHLEY COULTER

What would you do if you had never left home? Darius Weems went west!



Mr. Weems, who was 15 at the time of this documentary, was born in Athens, Georgia, with DMD, or Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. According to the documentary's Web site, DMD is the "most common fatal genetic disorder to affect children worldwide." In 1999, Mr. Weems watched as his

older brother, Mario, passed away from this very same disease. Soon thereafter, Mr. Weems had to start using a wheelchair to get around because of the loss of muscle control in his legs.

During the Summer of 2005, a group of his college-aged friends rent a wheelchair-accessible RV and start their 7,000-mile journey west. The idea that jumpstarted this adventure was Mr. Weems' goal to have MTV's "Pimp My Ride" customize his wheelchair. He believed that would be the perfect way to raise awareness about DMD with a generation not familiar with Jerry Lewis and his Telethons.

Mr. Weems had never left Athens, which meant that he had never seen the ocean, mountains or even another state. The trip begins by driving to the beach in Panama City, Florida. The look on Mr. Weems' face as his friends carry him into the ocean is priceless, as is the constant laughter as he experiences what it feels like to float on waves. On their

way to this location, the group makes the first of many pit stops and learn a quick lesson – not everywhere in the country is accessible. So they incorporate promoting accessibility into their trip as well – actually celebrating the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act at Carlsbad Cavern in New Mexico, which is, thankfully, completely accessible.

Other "firsts" for Mr. Weems include visiting Bourbon Street in New Orleans, taking a boat ride in a Louisiana swamp, white water rafting, seeing the Grand Canyon and the Strip in Las Vegas, a hot air balloon ride in Napa Valley, visiting the set of "Desperate Housewives", and seeing the Pacific Ocean. The clan attempt to explore the St. Louis arch, but it is not accessible.

Thanks to various foundations and corporations, this "band of brothers" was able to make a cross-country journey that created a bond that can never be broken. In the end, Darius Weems and his friends raised awareness about Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, accessibility and caretakers of people with disabilities. Mr. Weems considered himself lucky to have such a great group of friends to "go west" with him. In the closing interviews with each of the crew members, it is quite evident that they consider themselves to be the lucky ones, because they are a part of Mr. Weems' life.

This documentary is the winner of more than 25 awards at various film festivals across the US and Canada. All profits from this production go to Charley's Fund, a foundation that invests in DMD research. As Mr. Weems would say, "Know About It". For more info, visit [www.dgwknowaboutit.com](http://www.dgwknowaboutit.com).

Ashley Coulter is disability resource specialist/activities coordinator at Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and a recent graduate of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute.

## TENNESSEE DISABILITY MEGAConference

The Sixth Annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference will be held May 28-30, 2008, at the Airport Marriott in Nashville, Tennessee. This three-day event brings together a wealth of resources for Tennesseans with disabilities under



one roof. The numerous sessions throughout the day are designed to inform and inspire not only people with disabilities, but also their family members and professionals who

work with the disability community. Special events are scheduled for the evenings of the conference, which provide attendees with an opportunity to socialize and network.

For more information about the Sixth Annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference, including a list of presenters and registration details, visit our Web site at [www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org](http://www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org) or call 615-248-5878. You may also reach us toll free at 1-800-835-7077 or TTY at 615-298-2471. We hope to see you at Tennessee Disability MegaConference 2008!



# SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESOURCES

COMPILED BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

Being active and engaged in activities

that promote good health and good emotional well-being are necessary components of self-care. While physical activity may be limited for some, a number of modifications can be made to allow for individual abilities.

June Isaacson Kailes, MSW, LCSW, is a disability policy consultant who has written a helpful article on the confusion some people have about the relationship between having a disability and being healthy. The article can be read at [www.ncpad.org/wellness/fact\\_sheet.php?sheet=106](http://www.ncpad.org/wellness/fact_sheet.php?sheet=106).

The list below is selective; please contact [kc.vanderbilt.edu/tnpathfinder](mailto:kc.vanderbilt.edu/tnpathfinder) for suggestions for other fun and helpful sports and physical activity resources.

## Aquatics

**The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program (AFAP)** is a water exercise program designed for people (age 31+) with arthritis and related conditions. Water exercise is especially good for people with arthritis because it allows you to exercise without putting excess strain on your joints and muscles. The AFAP gives you the opportunity to do gentle activities in warm water, with guidance from a trained instructor. Although it is a non-clinical program — one that will not replace a prescribed regimen of therapeutic exercise — past participants have enjoyed some physical benefits such as decreased pain and stiffness. Knoxville: 865-470-7909, Memphis: 901-685-9060, Nashville: 615-254-6795, [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

## Fitness and Park Programs

**ABLE Youth (Athletes Building Life Experiences)** is a physical education and independence program that provides an opportunity for children and youth (ages 4-18) with physical disabilities to participate in structured sports and recreational activities. The ABLE Youth program offers opportunities to build strength, confidence, and physical and social skills. Nashville: 615-973-5372, [www.ableyouth.org](http://www.ableyouth.org)

The **Chattanooga Lifestyle Center** offers more than 250 distinct programs which include a balanced integration of preventative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, fitness and educational services. Individuals (age 19+) are seen and are provided with fitness programs, nutritional information and health education. Also, the Center seeks to promote lifestyle changes with measurable outcomes by helping individuals to change behaviors that are not healthy, e.g., smoking, poor eating habits, high cholesterol. 423-778-9400, [www.erlanger.org](http://www.erlanger.org)

**Nashville Parks and Recreation** includes programming for individuals with disabilities between the ages of 4 and 64. A wide range of daily recreational activities are available, including sports, music, art, bowling and swimming. Metro Parks Disabilities Staff also train Special Olympics athletes to participate and train volunteers to assist in training athletes. 615-883-1730, [www.nashville.gov/parks/index.htm](http://www.nashville.gov/parks/index.htm)

The **Patricia Neal Innovative Recreation Cooperative (IRC)** reflects its name in its philosophy. Innovation is new and creative ways in which individuals with a disability (ages 4+) are able to participate. Recreation is the medium that is used to enhance education and awareness of the participants. Cooperative is the group of individuals who support, nurture

and mentor, using their expertise and talents to make the clinic a success. The goal is to remove all barriers to develop each individual's right to self-directed leisure for a healthier lifestyle. Knoxville: 865-541-1353, [www.patneal.org/PNRC-IRC.CFM](http://www.patneal.org/PNRC-IRC.CFM)

The **Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation** and **Tennessee State Parks** provide reasonable accommodations to patrons with disabilities and opportunities for them to participate in the outdoor programs and activities. This effort is directed towards employment, providing accessible inn rooms, dining areas, camp grounds, bath houses, visitors' centers, overlooks, fishing piers, boat docks, golf courses, cabins, shelters, swimming pools, trails, exhibit areas and some natural areas. Special accommodations may be requested. [www.tennessee.gov/environment/parks/accessguide.shtml](http://www.tennessee.gov/environment/parks/accessguide.shtml)

The **Tennessee Wheelchair Athletic Association** offers tennis, basketball, water skiing, quad rugby, fishing, golf, softball and track and field opportunities for individuals who use a wheelchair. [www.twaasports.com](http://www.twaasports.com)

**United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Middle Tennessee's Sports and Recreation Program** is a year-round activity for people with disabilities and their families which takes place every Wednesday evening and during specially designated weekends. Activities include bowling, wheelchair basketball, board games and movie nights. Special activities include the annual family picnic and social at Centennial Park and "Fans on Wheels" activities at area sporting venues. Children may participate on the UCP sponsored Challenger League Baseball team. 615-242-4091, [www.ucpnashville.org/programs.html](http://www.ucpnashville.org/programs.html)

## Horseback Riding

The **Chattanooga Therapeutic Riding Center** is designed to help riders physically, cognitively, socially and psychologically while providing a wonderful form of recreation. Therapeutic horseback riding is offered to individuals 4-64 years of age. 423-899-9407, 800-369-7433, [www.narha.org](http://www.narha.org)

**Gaining Abilities Independently Therapeutically and Successfully (G.A.I.T.S.) of Nashville** is an equine-assisted therapy program for children and adults with physical disabilities. 615-662-6268

**Saddle Up!** is a therapeutic recreational horseback riding program designed for children with intellectual and physical disabilities. It is the oldest therapeutic riding program in the area, serving a broad range of children living throughout Middle Tennessee. 615-794-1150, ext. 1, [pplunkett@saddleupnashville.org](mailto:pplunkett@saddleupnashville.org)

## Sports and Disabilities Information

**The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability** is an information center. Listed on its site are a number of popular activities, games, recreational pursuits and sports that have been adapted to allow people with disabilities to participate as fully as they wish. [www.ncpad.org/index.php](http://www.ncpad.org/index.php)

## Sports Organizations

**Special Olympics of Tennessee** provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. [www.specialolympicstn.org/about.html](http://www.specialolympicstn.org/about.html)

# GROUNDBREAKING WELLNESS PROGRAM Targets Adults Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind

BY SHARON LIMPUS

A groundbreaking wellness program targeting individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind will provide the healthcare services they need and the appropriate communication to help ensure successful outcomes.

The League for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, based in Nashville, has been awarded a two-year grant of nearly \$76,000 by Baptist Healing Trust, Nashville. The funding will create a wellness program known as the PLUS Program — Positive Living for Ultimate Success — through the League in partnership with St. Thomas Health Services' Wellness Division. PLUS will offer health risk screenings, educational presentations on a variety of health-related topics, intervention programs in weight management, smoking cessation, stress management, exercise and social gatherings. All will incorporate interpreters and transcribers to assist those with hearing losses.

"With an unusually high rate of risk for health problems in this target population and the lack of resources in the traditional health services system to address this group, this program promises to be a pioneering effort that could, hopefully, become a model to be emulated in other parts of the country or even the world," said Les Hutchinson, PhD, former League president/CEO.

The partnership with St. Thomas Health Services, which includes St. Thomas Hospital and Baptist Hospital, will target a diverse population that is traditionally underserved due to the communication barriers they face, according to Dr. Hutchinson. The collaboration joins the



Photo by Jessica Sponseller

Joseph Ochoa exercising with April Fulcher of St. Thomas Health Services

League and St. Thomas Health Services, a leading supplier of health and wellness services.

Through the partnership, the League will provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, transcribers and space for the program, while St. Thomas Health Services will provide appropriate health professionals to do the screenings and lead many of the activities.

Heading the program for the League is Jessica Sponseller. A graduate of Trevecca Nazarene University with a master's degree in counseling, she is fluent in ASL and has served as an interpreter for the League as well as a counselor with Brentwood Counseling Associates.

"The Wellness Program will be an ongoing service that addresses the five elements of wellness – physical, medical, psychological, behavioral and spiritual," said Ms. Sponseller. "We will note the participant's progress based on both behavioral and biometric measures, such as marked periods on smoking cessation or reductions in blood pressure. Our goal is to offer this for adults of all ages and, in the near future, a parallel program for children age 8 through teens age 18."

Wellness activities and programs will include:

- a health risk assessment to determine specific risks based on each participant's demographics, medical background and lifestyle behaviors;
- biometric screenings such as height, weight, blood pressure, resting pulse, abdominal circumference and carbon monoxide measurement;
- educational presentations on topics such as general health and medical issues, nutrition, stress, lifestyle choices and on relevant legal issues related to people with disabilities rights and responsibilities to receive appropriate health care;
- counseling services;
- membership social activities;
- specific intervention classes on smoking cessation, weight management, stress management and exercise routines;
- clinics for blood pressure screening, lipid profiles, body fat assessments, etc.;
- special membership rates for those who might want to pursue more formal wellness offerings at either the Baptist or St. Thomas Hospital Wellness Centers; and
- an incentive program to provide meaningful rewards to those who participate on a regular basis and achieve individual milestones.

For more information, contact Jessica Sponseller at 615-248-8828 (V/TTY) or [js@ldhh.org](mailto:js@ldhh.org).

*Sharon Limpus provides communications and marketing services to the League for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. A homeschooling mom, she makes her home in Franklin with her husband, teenage son and a spoiled Beagle named Solo.*



# MEET *the* CHATTANOOGA SPEEDERS: 2008 EASTERN REGIONAL D-II CHAMPIONS!

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON AND RICK DAVIS

You’ve never heard of Power Soccer? Well, get ready to, because one of Tennessee’s homegrown teams – The Chattanooga Speeders – has just won the sport’s 2008 Eastern Regional competition.

Power Soccer, exclusively for athletes in power wheelchairs, is a four-on-four competition played on indoor basketball courts. Players control the large soccer ball through the use of plastic or metal guards which attach to the front of their power chairs. These guards allow players to advance, pass and score the ball.

“Historically, truly competitive wheelchair ball sports have consisted of players who have superior hand strength and coordination performing amazing feats with basketballs and tennis balls while navigating their manual wheelchairs,” says Rick Davis, the team’s goalkeeper. “I know of very few competitive sports available to people in power chairs – especially people like me – who have poor coordination and weak muscles.

“In my daily life, I cannot walk, speak clearly, drive a car, fully dress myself, etc.,” continues Mr. Davis. “But off-the-court abilities and disabilities truly make no difference on the court. As a player, I see teammates and opponents – not other people with disabilities. There is no special treatment, and every team and player competes with the same rules. A player had better ‘bring it’ or he’ll go away disappointed. Speaking as a long-time sports fan who finally has an opportunity to participate, it just doesn’t get any better than that!”

A Power Soccer match consists of two 20-minute periods. Many teams have more than four players, which allows reserves to come in and out. But currently, the Speeders only have four very competitive players who are all charter members: Peter Andersen (age 8), Rusty Crump (age18),

Cameron Watkins (age 16) and Mr. Davis (age 43), plus enthusiastic head coach Mike Andersen.

“Power Soccer is one sport that people with disabilities of all ages can participate in,” says Mr. Crump. “It can be just as exciting as football, basketball or even regular soccer. People should be aware of a person with a disability’s capacity for determination and team spirit, which is just as good as any other athlete’s. That’s why Power Soccer is so important: it gives everyone a chance to see what we, the players, are really made of!”

What the Speeders are made of became abundantly clear at the USPSA (United States Power Soccer Association) Eastern Regionals in Atlanta – the team’s first-ever tournament of this magnitude. The Speeders competed in a nine-team field of Division II teams and, according to Mr. Davis, were the second most inexperienced team in the tournament. “We went 5-0 and outscored our opponents by a combined score of 31-3,” says Mr. Davis. “In addition, Cameron Watkins was selected as MVP and Peter Anderson was the top scorer in the Division II tournament!”

If you’re interested in more information about Power Soccer, or are thinking you might make a great addition to the Speeders, contact Rick Davis at [norwooder@comcast.net](mailto:norwooder@comcast.net).

*Ned Andrew Solomon is director of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute and Youth Leadership Forum with the Council on Developmental Disabilities.*

*Rick Davis is a life-long sports fan, ecstatic about the opportunity to play Power Soccer for the Speeders! His other passions include his dog, Roseanne, friends, Glen Campbell music and the neon lights of Las Vegas.*

Standing (left to right): assistant coach Mike Watkins; head coach Mike Andersen; sitting (left to right): Rick Davis, Cameron Watkins, Peter Andersen, Rusty Crump

# BECOMING AN ACTIVE PART OF THE COMMUNITY

BY DEL RAY ZIMMERMAN

In the mid-1990’s, leaders of the Points of Light Foundation noticed a perplexing national trend: people with disabilities were not, for the most part, active volunteers in their communities compared to the total population.

Not understanding this phenomenon, the Foundation immediately commissioned a study to find out why. The expectation was that transportation, attitudinal barriers and lack of accessibility would be primary factors in people with disabilities not volunteering. The actual findings were surprising.

So, what is the number one reason why people with disabilities don’t volunteer in their communities?

They’re not asked.

This fact has a few not-so-positive implications. First of all, because the rate of volunteerism is so low, it assumes that people with disabilities aren’t interested in volunteering. Secondly, and this is more conjecture than fact, it also implies that people with disabilities are typically the recipients of community programs and not the givers of service to others.

On the flip side, however, it suggests that, if invited, most people with disabilities would jump at the chance to volunteer.

One would reason, then, that it is incumbent upon community agencies that rely on volunteers to do a better job of increasing opportunities for people of varying abilities and asking them to serve. To do so would create a win-win situation. Agencies would increase their volunteer base to solve serious societal issues and more people with disabilities would have new outlets to demonstrate their skills.

Volunteering is an amazing way to achieve goals that any of us have. Getting to meet new people, being an active part of the community, helping others, expanding knowledge and aptitude and making a real difference are all natural by-products of such a worthwhile activity.

In the face of recent natural and man-made disasters, increasing poverty and illiteracy rates, the longevity of our senior population and public health concerns, we need more volunteers to serve these areas.

Also, considering that Tennessee — the Volunteer State — currently ranks 39th in the nation for the rate of volunteerism among citizens (according to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007), we need to draw upon all of our available resources to turn community problems around.

There’s at least one new statewide group beginning to tout the benefits of service and asking people with disabilities to serve. The Tennessee National Service Inclusion Advisory Team (TNSIAT) was developed late

last year to increase and support the number of people with disabilities participating in AmeriCorps and other national service programs. AmeriCorps is like the domestic Peace Corps and engages more than 70,000 Americans every year to meet needs in education, poverty, health, the environment and homeland security.

Co-sponsored by Volunteer Tennessee — the State agency that administers AmeriCorps programs locally — and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, TNSIAT already includes 16 agencies that are committed to enlisting more people with disabilities in AmeriCorps and ensuring their success.

Currently, there are 12 AmeriCorps programs across Tennessee. Members build homes, mentor youth, assist seniors, clean up lakes and rivers and conduct health screenings.

In exchange for a year of service, AmeriCorps members receive some incredible benefits. They receive a living allowance of approximately \$12,000 and an education award of \$4,725, which can help pay for vocational or advanced degree programs. Some schools will even match the education award. AmeriCorps can be a great way for anyone to transition from school to work, gain new skills and increase a network of contacts. Most importantly, though, members gain the benefit of being an important and active part of the community.

AmeriCorps members should be at least 17 years of age, a citizen of the United States and have the ability to perform the service functions of the program with or without a reasonable accommodation.

Last year, 19 Tennesseans with disabilities, out of nearly 300 total members, successfully completed a year of AmeriCorps service. TNSIAT hopes to double that number over the next couple of years to make the programs more reflective of American society.

A long-term service commitment like AmeriCorps won’t fit into everyone’s life. That certainly doesn’t mean that people with disabilities can’t make positive contributions. Volunteers are needed every day for all kinds of projects. Anyone who has the time to give can find outlets to match their interests and skills with a community need. If a person enjoys animals, volunteer at a local shelter; if a person has lots of love and compassion to give, visit residents of a nursing home or send cards to overseas soldiers. The opportunities are endless when a person is ready to serve.

People just shouldn’t wait to be asked. As the Points of Light Foundation discovered, we, as a nation, aren’t very good at doing that.

*Anyone interested in learning more about AmeriCorps opportunities should contact Del Ray Zimmerman, Volunteer Tennessee’s Access AmeriCorps manager, at 615-253-2990 or [delray.zimmerman@state.tn.us](mailto:delray.zimmerman@state.tn.us). Also visit [www.volunteertennessee.net](http://www.volunteertennessee.net) or [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov).*





# ARE YOU PREPARED?

**BY TERRI URBANO** It was an unusual day. It was warm and breezy, very atypical for February in Tennessee. But as the day progressed, the skies became dark with rapidly moving clouds. By evening, television news shows reported a rapidly moving line of thunderstorms with the possibility of tornados. By 10 pm, the warnings had become realities. Many areas of Tennessee had suffered extensive damage and numerous deaths.

The February, 2008, tornados point out the need for all of us to prepare for emergencies. In Tennessee, the greatest risks include tornados, flash floods, earthquakes, ice storms, the flu and home fires. We cannot always prevent such events, but we can prepare and respond to a disaster.

Emergency preparation includes some basic steps for everyone and specific modifications for individual needs.

- 1. MAKE A PERSONAL PLAN AND PRACTICE IT WITH ALL FAMILY MEMBERS.**
- Consider getting on a community registry that identifies people who may need special help during and after an emergency.
  - Have home equipment (for example a weather radio or other emergency alert system) to alert you of possible danger.
  - Have enough food, water, battery operated equipment and extra batteries to support your family for two weeks without electricity or water.
  - Consider what special needs and equipment you need every day. Keep extra supplies on hand.
  - Plan how you would function every day if the people who usually help you cannot get there due to downed trees or other obstacles.
  - Plan where you would go if you needed to leave your home after an emergency. These situations can be managed successfully if you plan ahead.

- 2. GATHER YOUR EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION.**
- List the names and phone numbers of your family, close friends and others who support you.
  - Keep the list of names and phone numbers by your phone and another list in your wallet.
- 3. GATHER EMERGENCY DOCUMENTS.**
- Health insurance and copy of card
  - Copy of prescription drug plan card
  - Copies of prescriptions
  - List of medications (names, dose, times)
  - Copy of Social Security card
  - Banks and account numbers
  - Copies of important papers, such as marriage and death certificates, stocks, passports and insurance policies (medical, home, car)
  - Summary of medical history
  - Special accommodations
  - Instructions for safely communicating with you
  - Instructions for safely moving you and your equipment
  - Allergies and sensitivities
  - Copy of electrical or water bill showing your address, to prove place of residence

- 4. SHARE CRITICAL INFORMATION WITH A TRUSTED PERSON.**
- Tell a trusted person in your family or support person where to find important information.
- Emergency contact list

- Important information
- Emergency supplies
- Emergency utility shutoffs
- Evacuation plans

Ask a trusted person to check on your well-being after an emergency.

**5. GATHER YOUR DISASTER SUPPLIES.**

Keep these emergency supplies in your home. Store smaller amounts of these items in a suitcase you could take with you if you needed to leave your home because of an emergency.

- Enough bottled water for everyone in the family for two weeks (change every six months)
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable radio and extra batteries
- Cell phone and charger (optional)
- First aid kit
- Hand operated can opener
- Two-week supply of non-perishable food (change every six months)
- Two-week supply of essential emergency prescriptions and over-the-counter medications
- Two-week supply of disposable supplies
- Backup equipment necessary for survival
- Extra cash
- Blanket
- Whistle on a string
- Toilet paper or wipes
- Soap
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Chlorine bleach (unscented)
- Small shovel or plastic garbage bags for disposing of waste
- Matches (in a waterproof container)
- Pet food and supplies (if applicable)
- Paper and pencil or pen
- Dust masks
- Rain coat or plastic tarp
- Extra supply of clothes, socks and shoes

**6. PRACTICE TELLING OTHERS WHAT YOU NEED.**

This includes telling people who help you that you need to keep your medicines and equipment with you.

**Verbal Examples**

- My medicines are in the drawer by my bed.
- My dog is a service animal and must come with me.

**Other communication strategies**

- If you cannot speak, write your comments on a pad of paper.
- If you have difficulty hearing, use the flashlight to read lips.

**7. KNOW HOW TO RESPOND.**

- Stay calm
- Put your plan into action
- Listen to the radio for instructions
- Watch for unusual hazards
- Check in with your support system
- Avoid accidents

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

American Red Cross <http://www.redcross.org>  
American Academy of Pediatrics <http://www.aap.org>  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>  
Federal Emergency Management Agency <http://fema.gov/areyouready>  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security <http://www.ready.gov/be ready>

*Terri Urbano, PhD., MPH, RN is Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Vanderbilt University, and director of Training and of Health, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.*





BY MELISSA FORTSON

RECREATION INFORMATION ON THE PATHFINDER WEB SITE

These sports and leisure resources - and more!- can be found on the Pathfinder Web site at [www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org)

People of all abilities should have access to recreational facilities and activities. The **United States Access Board** publishes ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) for Play Areas and Recreation Facilities. Web: <http://www.access-board.gov/>

The Community Life section of **DisabilityInfo.gov** includes information and links related to outdoor recreation, sports, fitness, travel and tourism resources. Includes tips for travelers with disabilities and information on the accessibility of federal recreation sites. Web: <http://www.disabilityinfo.gov> (click on "Community Life")

The **National Parks and Recreation Association** advances parks, recreation and environmental efforts that enhance quality of life for all. Its **National Therapeutic Recreation Society** branch provides resources related to therapeutic recreation. Web: <http://www.nrpa.org/>

The **Tennessee Disability Pathfinder** database lists disability and other community resources. These recreation-related service categories — and over 50 others — can be found on the Pathfinder Web site: <http://www.familypathfinder.org> (click on "Search the Pathfinder Database").

*Arts Programs & Therapy:* Programs that provide people with disabilities with organized opportunities to pursue the arts. Includes art, dance, music and theatre programs. Includes creative arts therapies.

*Camps or Summer Programs:* Residential or day camp facilities that are appropriately staffed and equipped to provide an opportunity for children who have developmental, emotional or health-related disabilities.

*Recreational Programs & Therapy:* Programs that provide opportunities for people of all ages to participate in the specific recreational activity, game or sport of their choice. Includes recreation therapy.

*Therapeutic Horseback Riding:* Programs that provide riding instruction to individuals with disabilities as part of their therapy treatment.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

English & Español  
(615) 322-8529  
(800) 640-4636

TTY/TDD users:  
please dial 711 for  
free relay service

[www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org)

[tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu)



*Melissa Fortson is information & referral specialist/program coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.*

YOUTH SUMMER SIGN PROGRAM

BY SHARON LIMPUS

Imagine communicating in three languages – English, Arabic and American Sign Language! That’s a reality now for one student at West End Middle School in Nashville who attended the Youth Summer Sign Program (YSSP), a day camp offered by the League for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Nashville.

Ayman Abdul Shaheed is hard of hearing and the youngest of five children. The energetic and friendly teen moved to the United States from Iraq when he was eight. Mr. Shaheed has been an active participant in the League’s youth program. Last Summer, he attended YSSP, a two-week day camp open to all students – hearing, deaf or hard of hearing – interested in learning American Sign Language.

“My comprehension moved from ‘better’ to ‘excellent!’” said Mr. Shaheed. “I learned how to sign better and communicate with other students.”

Mr. Shaheed also made new friends and had lots of fun. He said he is more self-confident after his YSSP experience.

This year, two sessions of the program will be offered, based on the participants’ grade levels. “Session 1” runs June 2-13 for 1st-6th grade students; “Session 2” is offered June 16-27 for 7th-12th grade students. Classes are Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4 pm and take place at the League’s Mary McKinney Youth Center, 415 Fourth Avenue South, Nashville.

“Our Youth Summer Sign Program opens up a world of new experiences for students of all ages – whether they are hearing, hard of hearing or deaf – because it is the perfect combination of fun and education,” said Brigitte Ochoa, director of Youth Services.

Last year, there were more students than ever participating in the League’s Summer camp programs. “We were able to offer some

scholarships from community partners, including the Middle Tennessee Electric Customers Care, Inc. and the Sertoma Clubs of Nashville and Hendersonville,” said Ms. Ochoa. “The League also participated in the Summer Camp Voucher Program through Metro Nashville Government. We were very grateful for all of this support. Without it, many students would have missed a fulfilling Summer camp experience.”

The cost of YSSP is \$300 per student, which includes all materials, supplies, snacks and field trips. Deadline for registration is May 30.

Other Summer camp programs offered by the League include:

**Camp Rise ‘N Sign** – a weekend overnight camp for youth who are deaf or hard of hearing, their siblings or hearing youth with deaf parents. Sponsored by the AT&T Pioneers and the League, this unique camp features indoor and outdoor activities. Students in grades two through 12 are welcome. Dates run Friday, May 2, to Sunday, May 4, at Camp Hillmont in White Bluff.

**Stepping Stones** – a Summer Youth Literacy program offered as a one-month-long day camp for youth in grades 4-8 who are deaf or hard of hearing. It features reading, writing, math, special activities, field trips and deaf culture. This program is offered weekdays from 9 am-4 pm from July 7 to 25 at the League’s Youth Center.

*For complete information, contact Brigitte Ochoa at [bo@ldhh.org](mailto:bo@ldhh.org) or 615-248-8828 (V/TTY), or visit [www.leagueforthe deaf.com](http://www.leagueforthe deaf.com).*

*Sharon Limpus provides communications and marketing services to the League for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. A homeschooling mom, she makes her home in Franklin with her husband, teenage son and a spoiled Beagle named Solo.*



TENNESSEE DULCIMER CHOIR

Providing Musical Opportunities for Students with Autism

BY ALICIA CONE AND SARAH ELIZABETH MUSGRAVE

Sarah Elizabeth Musgrave entered the world of autism when her two-year-old cousin, Sean, was diagnosed in 2004. Today, through her senior project, she is touching the lives of other children with autism. Ms. Musgrave and her songwriting partner, Tammy Vice, have developed a curriculum to teach children with autism how to play the mountain dulcimer without the need to verbally communicate, which is a challenge for some individuals on the autism spectrum.

Each week, Ms. Musgrave goes into a school as a volunteer intern with VSA arts Tennessee — a statewide nonprofit with a mission to

empower individuals with disabilities through the arts — and works one-on-one with children with autism. Some of these students will be given the opportunity to join a newly-formed performing dulcimer choir for children with autism through VSA arts Tennessee.

The Tennessee Dulcimer Choir is a project conceived by VSA arts Tennessee and funded by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. VSA arts Tennessee has partnered with the Grand Old Dulcimer Club to provide training sessions in Sumner and Davidson counties on the history and performance techniques of the dulcimer. The project primarily targets students with an autism spectrum disorder,

but also will include others who share an interest in learning about this unique Appalachian instrument.

Ultimately, the Tennessee Dulcimer Choir will represent the State in local and national festivals and performances. Other partners in this initiative include the Tennessee Department of Education, schools and community groups in Davidson and Sumner counties, the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University and Belmont University.

In addition to developing the dulcimer curriculum, Ms. Musgrave has been instrumental in creating other musical opportunities for students on the autism spectrum. In collaboration with the Blair School of Music, she coordinated a benefit concert in early March at the Turner Recital Hall at Vanderbilt University. A silent auction included donations from the Oak Ridge Boys, Dancing to the Spirit of the Wood, the French Shoppe, Brown’s Florist, Bodyworks Emporium, Hickory Tree Studio, Salsarita’s

and Staples, to name a few. The concert featured singer-songwriters Tammy Vice, Walt Aldridge and Gordon Ellis; jazz duo Beegie Adair and Jim Ferguson; Ms. Musgrave performing with friends Bill Taylor, Janita Baker and GR Davis; and special guest artist, Mark Leland.

Proceeds from the concert were used to purchase dulcimers for the Tennessee Dulcimer Choir members and will be theirs to keep. A May 3 2008, reception is planned at the Country Music Hall of Fame to induct the new members into the Tennessee Dulcimer Choir and present them with their instruments.

“As a performer and songwriter, I am proud to be part of a community in Nashville which has a strong desire to give back,” says Ms. Musgrave. “I grew up with music as a very important part of my life, and I want these children to have the same opportunities as I did.”

*Alicia A. Cone, PhD, is project research and development coordinator for the Council on Developmental Disabilities.*

# TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT

**Molly Littleton**, director of the **Assistive Technology Center** at **Signal Centers, Inc.** in **Chattanooga**, was bestowed the **Tom Morales Leadership in Accessible Technology Award** by the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) at their 20th Anniversary Gala celebration in Los Angeles, California, on March 14, 2008.

Tom Morales was the Program Manager of the Alliance from 1997 until his sudden death in 2003. A critical part of the ATA team, he represented its interests to thousands of individuals and organizations nationwide. This award recognizes leaders, either individuals or organizations, who are carrying on his work. Ms. Littleton, who has a master's degree in Special Education from the University of Cincinnati, has worked at Signal Centers for 30 years and helped begin Signal Centers' Assistive Technology Center in 1991. Her interest and area of expertise merge in technology for people with disabilities in order to promote their inclusion in mainstream society.

**Breakthrough Corporation's Respite and Recreation** program recently celebrated its third anniversary. The R&R Program meets for six hours weekly on Saturdays at the **Cansler YMCA** in **East Knoxville**. It provides participants with a place to relax, practice social skills, swim, play games, do arts and crafts, learn cooking skills and use the gymnasium/workout facilities. Under the direction of **Angie Giffin**, the R&R program was Breakthrough's first direct service program and over the past few years has provided structured therapeutic recreation for adults with autism and temporary respite for parents and caregivers.



**Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) 2007** graduate **Patrick Kelty** and his mother, current **Partners in Policymaking** participant **Dena Gassner**, were very busy in March. The two joined national advocates speaking to representatives and senators about autism issues on March 13th. The next day, they took their message to the **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)** in Bethesda, Maryland, where they addressed money following the person, increased services and supports, inclusion and acceptance of others with developmental disabilities other than mental retardation into the service delivery model.

Mr. Kelty is currently a junior at **Centennial High School** in **Franklin**. He is the manager of the hockey team and is active as a sponsor of Happy Meal toy collections for children in Nicaragua at his church. Ms. Gassner provides family and individual coaching in the **Nashville** area, and professional development on training on autism differences around the country.

**YLF 2002** graduate **Spencer Jackson** is continuing his studies at **Motlow State Community College**. He plans to graduate in December with an associate's degree. Mr. Jackson is a sophomore senator in the **Student Government Association** at Motlow and recently advocated for additional accessible parking spaces on campus.

In **Jackson**, local families worked together to create the **Yates Foundation** to benefit children with autism. A part of **West Tennessee Healthcare Foundation**, the Yates Foundation is named for **Yates Hazlehurst** and is coordinated by a local group, including his mom, **Angela Hazlehurst** – a member of the **Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities** – and family friend, **Eliza Forbes**.

The group's mission is to advocate on behalf of and to empower those in the autism community to never give up in their search to help their loved ones reach their full potential. They plan to raise public and professional awareness about autism and related disorders; solicit and receive funds in order to provide financial and educational assistance to families in need; and assist in the advancement of research of individuals with autism and related disorders.

**Vanderbilt Kennedy Center** recently was represented at the renaming of the **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development** in honor of **Eunice Kennedy Shriver**. Established in 1962, the Institute is now called the **Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development** (NICHD). The NICHD also has renamed its **Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers Program** in honor of Mrs. Shriver. These 14 university-based facilities, which includes the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, will be known as the **Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers Program**.

NICHD, which provides support for the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's research services, is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments and cures for both common and rare diseases.



Left to Right: Governor Frank Clement, Rose Kennedy, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Sargent Shriver, 1965. Courtesy of Peabody College Photographic Archives, Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives

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